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LIFE OF THE HON. JOHN CALDWELL CALHOUN.

John Caldwell Calhoun was born, March 18th, 1782, in Abbeville District, South Carolina, where his younger brother Patrick now resides. His Grandfather, James Calhoun, emigrated with his family from Ireland, and settled in Pennsylvania, in 1773.

His father, Patrick Calhoun, was then six years old. Several years afterwards the family removed to the western part of Virginia, but upon Braddock's defeat, the settlement was broken up, and they went to South Carolina, when, 1756, they established themselves in a place which was called, "Calhoun's settlement." Here the Cherokees, their immediate neighbors, very soon attacked them. The struggle was violent. Half the males, and among them, the eldest brother James Calhoun, who commanded on the occasion, fell; after the defeat, their aged mother, with several of the other females and many of the children, were butchered by the Savages. Patrick Calhoun, who displayed daring courage, was immediately appointed by the provincial government to command a body of rangers for the defence of the frontier, and showed himself worthy of the station. Upon the conclusion of peace, the family, which had been dispersed reoccupied "their settlement."

In 1770, Patrick Calhoun was married to Martha Caldwell, of Charlotte County, Virginia, niece of the Rev. James Caldwell, of New Jersey, a Presbyterian Divine, who stood prominent in the revolutionary war. The issue of this marriage were four sons and one daughter, of whom the subject of this memoir was the youngest but one, and as a tribute of respect to the memory of his uncle, Major John Caldwell, a zealous whig, who had been inhumanly butchered by the tories, he received the name of John Caldwell Calhoun.

Both parents were exemplary for piety and virtue. The father was a hardy and enterprising pioneer; but unlike most of that class, he placed a high value upon education. Though he was entirely self-taught, and lived the greater part of his life on the frontier, surrounded by danger, he made himself an excellent English scholar, and an accurate and skillful surveyor, which profession he long followed. He was the first member ever elected to the provincial Legislature from the interior of South Carolina. Of this body, and the State Legislature, after the revolution, he continued a member for thirty years without intermission, except for a single term, until his death, in 1796. He was a zealous whig, and a disinterested patriot. He opposed the adoption of the federal constitution on the ground that it conferred rights on Congress incompatible with the sovereignty of the States.

At thirteen years of age, young Calhoun was placed at the academy of his brother in-law, the Rev. Dr. Waddel, since so distinguished, as a teacher, in the Southern States. The death of the father, however, interrupted his studies, and this academy ceased for a time. He continued to reside with Dr. Waddel, and made ample use of the circulating library, of which his brother-in law was Librarian. Hither he resorted instinctively, and without any direction, passing over lighter, and, to persons of his age, usually more alluring literature, fixed his attention upon history. With such unremitting industry did he labor, that he is said to have read, in the course of fourteen weeks, Rollin's Ancient History, Robertson's Charles V., and America Voltaire's Charles XII, the large edition of Cook's Voyages, the first volume of Locke on the Human Understanding, and several small works. Under this severe application, in which his meals and rest were neglected, his eyes were injured, his countenance grew pallid, and his whole frame became emaciated. His mother alarmed for his health, took him home, where separation from books, air and exercise, very soon reinstated him; and to his love of books, succeeded, by a natural transition, a passion for the sports of the country. Though the progress of his education was now arrested, yet his new manner of life laid the foundation of a vigorous constitution, and he contracted, also, that fondness of Agriculture, which has distinguished so many illustrious names.

In the midst of family arrangements, and in consequence of his growing attachment to agricultural pursuits, John had abandoned all thought of his former studies, when his brother James, who had been placed in a counting house in Charleston, returned home to spend the summer of 1800, and was so struck with his capacity, that he importuned him to turn his attention at once to a classical education, though it was not till after great persuasion, that he yielded to his brother's judgment. Accordingly he proceeded to Dr. Waddel's academy, which had been reopened in Columbia county, Georgia, where in 1800, he may properly be said to have begun, at the age of eighteen a classical education. Here his progress was so rapid, that he was enabled to join the junior class at Yale college in the autumn of 1802.

In the Institution he took a high grade in all the studies, but though he did not want imagination and taste; he was peculiarly distinguished by his depth and quickness of his intellect. He differed widely from Dr. Dwight, the eminent individual who presided over the college, in political opinions, and although they had frequent discussions, they were always of a friendly character. It is related that in the course of a recitation in Paley's Philosophy, the Doctor expressed a doubt "whether the consent of the governed, was the only origin of legitimate government? This caused an animated debate between him and his pupil, which held the class in delighted suspense till dinner, in the course of which the student evinced such depth of thought, and such power of argument and eloquence, this celebrated preceptor predicted his future rise. "That young man," he said to a friend, "has talents enough to be President of the United States."

Just four years after commencing the Latin Grammar, he graduated with the highest honors, at the head of a large and talented class, but he was prevented by sickness from delivering his oration, the subject of which was "The qualifications necessary to a perfect statesman."

After enrolling himself, on his return home a student of law with H. W. DeSaussure, he went to N. England, and entered the Litchfield law school, where, for eighteen months, under Judge Reeve and Gould, he made great advancement. The morning was devoted to law, the rest of the day to general literature and political science, and he cultivated with especial care, extemporaneous speaking. It was in the debating society of this place, where the most agitated political topics of the day were discussed before crowded meetings, that Mr. Calhoun, who was ever the champion of the republican side, first developed his great powers of parliamentary debate. It was his custom, even then, to prepare by reflection, and not by arranging on paper, what he meant to say. A good memory presented the order of his own thoughts, and a wonderful power of analysis and classification enabled him to digest rapidly, and distribute in their proper places, the answer and refutation of all the arguments of the speakers, however numerous, whom he followed.

In 1804, he returned to South Carolina, and in 1807 commenced, in his native district, a lucrative practice, ranking, from the very outset, with the most eminent lawyers in his circuit. An incident occurred about this time, which brought him into distinguished notice. The affair of the Chesapeake had just created great excitement throughout the South; a meeting of the people was called at Abbeville court house, and Mr. Calhoun was one of the committee appointed to draft an address and resolutions. He was requested also to address the meeting. The day arrived—the assembly was large. It was his first appearance before the public, and trying as was the situation, he acquitted himself in a manner that egcited enthusiastic approbation. Soon after he was proposed as a candidate for the next legislature, and in spite of a prejudice which for years had prevented the election of a lawyer, he was chosen by an overwhelming majority. Here, during two successive sessions, he took the lead in every matter of importance, and eminently distinguished himself for that political foresight and sagacity, for which he has ever been so remarkable.

In the autumn of 1811, Mr. Calhoun took his seat in Congress, at the commencement of the first Session of the twelfth Congress, having been elected by a vast majority to represent the district composed of Abbeville, Newberry and Laurens. His reputation had preceded him, and he was placed at once on the committee of foreign affairs, which was at that juncture the most important. An able report, on which the discussion of the session chiefly turned, recommended an immediate appeal to arms, and Mr. Calhoun's first effort was in sustaining the measures recommended, in reply to a most able and eloquent speech of John Randolph, also a member of committee, and one of the most sagacious opponents and powerful orators of which this or any country ever boasted. Public excitement was strong, the house crowded, and the orator, rising with the greatness of the occasion, delivered a speech, which, for lofty patriotism, cogent reasoning, and soul-stirring eloquence, has seldom been equalled. It met unbounded and universal applause. He was compared to "one of the old sages of the old Congress, with the graces of youth," and the "young Carolinian" was hailed as "one of the master spirits, who stamp their name upon the age in which they live."

Early in the Session, General Porter retired from Congress, and Mr. Calhoun was placed at the head of the committee on foreign relations, which committee, in addition to their appropriate duties, were called upon to report bills to carry into effect the military preparations they had recommended. Thus by circumstances, as well as by pre-eminent ability, was he at this early period at the head of the party in the House of Representatives, which sustained the war with England.

It was at this momentous period he delivered one of his best speeches, from which a short passage may be here extracted, as well because it evinced his profound and philosophical character of mind, as the independence of spirit, which could not in all cases submit to the trammels of party, and led him to differ, in common with his able and virtuous colleague, Lowndes, from the administration, on the subject of the restrictive system and the Navy. In speaking of the embargo, he says,—"I object to the restrictive system, because it does not suit the genius of the people, nor that of the government, nor the geographical character of our country. We are a people essentially active, I may say we are punctually so, no passive system can suit such a people; in action superior to all others; in patient endurance inferior to none. Nor does it suit the genius of our goverment. Our government is founded on freedom, and hates coercion. To make the restrictive system effective, requires the most arbitrary laws. England, with the severest statutes, has not been able to exclude prohibited articles; and Napoleon, with all his power and vigilance, was obliged to resort to the most barbarous laws to enforce his continental system. This nation ought to be taught to rely on its own courage, its fortitude, its skill, and virtue for protection. These are the only safeguards in the hour of danger. Man was endowed with these great qualities for his defence. There is nothing about him that indicates that he is to conquer by endurance; he is not encrusted in a shell; he is not taught to rely upon his insensibility, his passive suffering, for defence. No, sir, it is on the invincible mind, on a magnanimous nature, he ought to rely. Herein is the superiority of our kind; it is these that render man the lord of the world. It is the destiny of his condition that nations rise above nations, as they are endowed in a greater degree with these brilliant qualities."

To trace Mr. Calhoun's course or to recount his services during the war, would fill a volume. It is sufficient to say, that in the leading position of chairman of the committee of foreign relations, in a complication of adverse circumstances, during the gloom of that contest, calculated to overwhelm the feeble and appal the stoutest, against a weight and ardor of opposition unknown to the Congress of the revolution, he never faltered, never doubted, never despaired of the Republic; by his genius and wisdom, patriotism and unshaken firmness, he rose conspicuous in the constellation of talents which distinguished both sides, and arousing his countrymen to action by the animating strains of eloquence, made himself the chief supporter of the "second war of independence," and finally triumphed in the sunshine of glory which burst upon the country at its termination.

At this period, the army, the navy, and the revenue had grown beyond the wants of peace, and the currency was deranged beyond all former example, except at the close of the revolution. These subjects gave birth to momentous questions. Of these the first was the military peace establishment, about which there was great diversity of opinion. Mr. Calhoun contended that a small peace establishment, was most congenial with the institutions of the country, and that the great point was to have it permanent and well organized, an object which he afterwards effectually accomplished while Secretary of War.

The other important subjects were deferred till the following session, when Mr. Calhoun was placed at the head of the committee on currency. Events which took place at the preceding session, had designated him for the place, as he had then successfully resisted the project of a non-specie paying bank, (devised principally with a view to enable government to raise loans for the prosecution of the war,) under the conviction that such a bank, by reason of these loans, would, on the return of peace, be enlisted against the resumption of specie payments, and that its influence, united with that of the State banks, would defeat the efforts of Congress to re-establish a sound currency. He believed that it was intended by the constitution, to place the currency under the control of the general government, and that the power over it was delegated to Congress, and *was not a right reserved to the States.* Nothing could exceed the derangement of the currency at the termination of the war, when that power was exclusively used by the States, and the notes of the banks incorporated by them, which could not be converted into specie, and were depreciated, according to circumstances, from one to twenty per centum, constituted the currency in which the public dues were collected, the public creditors paid, and moneyed transactions of the country carried on. After a full examination of the various remedies proposed for so fearful a disease, which threatened the Union itself, it was believed by the committee that the only practicable means of restoring a sound currency, and placing it under the constitutional control of the general government, was the establishment of a bank of sufficient capital on sound principles, bound to redeem their notes in cash, which, by its influence and aid, would at once compel and assist the State banks to specie payments. A bill in conformity with this belief was reported by Mr. Calhoun, and with such forcible arguments did he sustain it, so clearly did he demonstrate the unconstitutional condition of the currency, so manifestly did he prove its danger and injustice; and that there was no other feasible remedy in the power of the house, that in spite of the opposing influence of the State banks, the constitutional scruples of many of the members, and the resistance of a number of the leaders of the opposition, he succeeded in effecting the passage of the bill, though it was well ascertained that a decided majority were opposed to it at its introduction. Of this powerful speech nothing remains but an imperfect skeleton.

Besides the revenue bill, which gave rise to a debate on the state of the Union, involving a discussion of the policy of the country in time of peace, in which Mr. Calhoun made one the most splendid displays of parliamentary eloquence ever exhibited before Congress; other important subjects arose, in all of which he took a prominent part. But the lofty course pursued by him in regard to the "famous compensation law," very strongly marks his character, and may, perhaps, the best judged of, from the following eulogium pronounced by a strong political opponent. Mr. Grosvenor said "he had heard with peculiar satisfaction, the able, manly, constitutional speech of the gentleman from South Carolina." Here Mr. Grosvenor, recurring in his own mind to a personal difference with Mr. Calhoun, which arose during the war—paused a moment and then proceeded—"Mr. Speaker, I will not be restrained—no barrier shall exist, which I shall not leap over, for the purpose of offering to that gentleman my thanks for the judicious, independent, and national course which he has pursued in the house for the last two years, and particularly on the subject now before us. Let the honorable gentlemen continue with the same independence, aloof from party views and local prejudices, to pursue the great interest of his country, and fulfil the high destiny for which it is manifest he was born. The buzz of popular applause may not cheer him on the way, but he will inevitably arrive at a high and happy elevation in the view of his country and the world."

In December, 1817, Mr. Calhoun was appointed by Mr. Monroe to the office of Secretary of War. Here was a new theatre; his congressional career of six years had been brilliant; as a legislator, and as an orator he stood on a proud elevation before his country, and now his capacity for administration was to be tested. Such was the deranged state of the department, the vast accumulation of its business, and its imperfect organization, that many friends dissuaded him from occupying a post of so much danger. Space will not permit even a sketch of the history of his administration of the war department during seven years. He found it in all its branches, in confusion, and left it in complete order. He found upwards of forty millions of dollars of unsettled accounts, which he reduced to less than three millions, and he completely prevented all further accumulation by the unexampled exactness of accountability which he introduced into every branch of the disbursements, and in consequence of which he was enabled to report to Congress in 1823, that, of the entire amount of money drawn from the treasury in 1822, for the military services, including pensions, amounting to four millions five hundred and seventy-one thousand nine hundred and sixty-one dollars and ninety-four cents, although it passed through the hands of two hundred and ninety-one disbursing agents, there had not been a single defalcation, nor the loss of a cent to the government: and that he had reduced the expense of the army from four hundred and fifty dollars per man, to two hundred and eighty-seven dollars, and thereby saved to the country annually more than one million three hundred thousand dollars.

It is to be remembered that all this was done under adverse circumstances; when Mr. Calhoun, who had been brought forward as a candidate for the Presidency, had to encounter misrepresentations, and a violent opposition to almost every measure he proposed for the improvement of the department. In fact it is only by the perfect order and system brought into the department, that it is possible to explain how Mr. Calhoun found time for preparing his numerous reports, which are not surpassed by our ablest public documents, particularly those on our Indian affairs, and the reduction of the army; for the despatch of the immense mass of unsettled accounts of the war; for the examination of the claims for revolutionary pensions; the thorough resuscitation of the military academy, the establishment of discipline and rigid economy in the army; a complete re-organization, which gave us at the expense of a force of six thousand men, so offiered as to be capable of prompt enlargement; a peace establishment having the military capacity, and defensive power of thirty thousand; the saving of our maritime frontier; the institution of a system of permanent fortifications for our coast; the establishment of a cordon of military posts, stretching from the upper lakes around our western frontiers; and finally, for his duties as a leading and influential member of Mr. Monroe's able and enlightened cabinet.

In the second term of Mr. Monroe's Presidency, the question of the choice of a successor agitated the country, and Mr. Calhoun's name was brought forward with those of four other distinguished candidates. Events had turned the controversy, so far as he was concerned, more particularly between his friends and those of Mr. Crawford, on the subject of a Congressional *caucus*, as the means of designating the chief magistrate. Mr. Calhoun believed that, in consequence of great increase of the patronage of the government, it was dangerous to place thus in the power of the President, the choice of his successor; through his influence over the members of Congress, and took a decided stand against it. In the progress of the canvass, Mr. Calhoun's name was withdrawn so as to strengthen the probability of a choice by the people, and consequently to lessen the hazard of the election being devolved upon the House of Representatives. The contest terminated in returning Gen. Jackson, Mr. Adams, and Mr. Crawford as the three highest candidates to the house, and the election of Mr. Calhoun by a large majority of the people as Vice President. We cannot dwell on the events which succeeded. During the whole canvass Mr. Calhoun bore very kind personal and political relations with both the leading candidates; but acting on the principle which had placed him in opposition to a Congressional caucus, he did not hesitate to avow his opinion, that the members of the House, in discharging the high duties devolved on them, ought to act in reverence and subordination to the will of the people. He was necessarily, therefore, placed in opposition, which at the end of the term, overthrew the administration, and terminated in the election of Gen. Jackson as President, and the re-election of himself as Vice President.

It is admitted that Mr. Calhoun conferred upon the Vice-Presidency a dignity and character worthy of the station. His decisions gave universal satisfaction, with one exception, the circumstances of which were remarkable, viz: his decision in regard to the power of the Vice President, as presiding officer of the Senate, to call a Senator to order *for words spoken in debate.* The Senate at no period had been in such a state of excitement. Mr. Mr. Calhoun was known to be opposed to the administration. It was the first case which had occurred, and the principle on which the decision rested was novel. The Constitution gives each House the power of establishing its rules of proceeding, and there existed at this time no rule in the Senate which gave the Vice-President the power in question. Accordingly, while those who took the opposite view contended that the Vice-President possessed this power inherently under the Constitution, as the presiding officer of that body, Mr. Calhoun decided that as the rules did not confer the power, either expressly, or by implication, he did not possess it, believing if he possessed it under the Constitution there could be no appeal to the Senate, and the freedom of debate in that body would depend upon the pleasure of an officer who held his place independent of it. Satisfied with the correctness of his decision, Mr. Calhoun evinced not the slightest impatience at the clamor which followed. He calmly and confidently left his conduct to abide the result of the cooler, and more mature investigation. The result has proved that a good cause may be left to the quiet operation of time. After the lapse of two years, the senate without any movement of his friends, took up the subject, after a full examination and discussion, Mr. Calhoun's decision received the deliberate sanction of that body.

This brings us down to a period so near the present time, that it is not necessary to give even a sufficient narrative of Calhoun's course as connected with public events, and accordingly we pass over the measures adopted by Gen'l. Jackson on his accession to power, the position in which Mr. Calhoun was placed in relation to him politically in consequence of those measures, the rupture of their political and private relations, the correspondence to which it gave rise, the character of that correspondence, and the vindication of his own conduct which it contains. We pass over all these, and come to that portion of his political life which his friends confidently believe will hereafter be the most distinguished, and will most strongly mark his character with posterity. We mean that which followed the passage of the tariff of 1828, and the part which he felt himself compelled to take in resistance to what he considered an unconstitutional and oppressive act, in order to arrest a course of events which he clearly perceived, at that early period, would grow out of the measure, and which he was under a deep conviction would terminate, if not arrested, in the destruction of the liberty and the constitution of the country, or in the dissolution of the Union. Apprehending, from what he saw in the passage of the tariff act of 1828, that the expectations of the friends of an equal system of benefits and burdens in reference to the protective system, and a thorough reformation of the government, and restoration of the constitution to its primitive principles, which he deemed necessary to the preservation of the country, could not be realized in any other way, he turned his attention from that time to *the sovereignty of the States, and their reserved rights* as the only certain means of effecting these objects, the salvation of our institution, and of the Union. The result was, that view of our system which recognized each State as a sovereign party to the political compact, a right to declare an act of Congress, which it believes to be unconstitutional, to be null and void, and of ccurse not obligatory upon its citizens, and to arrest the execution of such an act within its limits. This doctrine which was rendered so unpopular under the name of *nullification*, is maintained to be clearly contained in the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions,* is more fully stated and carried out in the discussions to which it gave rise in the controversy between South Carolina and the general government. In these discussions, the papers prepared by Mr. Calhoun constitute a striking part.

The first of these papers attributed to him is the exposition of the South Carolina Legislature in the Session of 1828, in which a full and very original view is taken of the relations between the States and the general government, and the operation of the productive system as effecting unequally the two great sections of the Union. This was followed, in 1830, by a statement drawn up by Mr. Calhoun, containing his opinion on the relation between the State and the general government, in deference to public opinion, which seem to demand an exposition of his views on a subject which then began so deeply to agitate the country. The open avowal of doctrines then considered by many a little short of treason, which he knew would separate him from many of his political friends, on a conviction of duty, and without regard to the effect it would have upon his popularity, required a firmness of purpose and a deep and solemn sense of duty which few possessed. Subsequently, at Governor Hamilton's request, he addressed him a letter, in which the subject is more amply discussed, and which acquired for Mr. Calhoun a reputation for ability and candor even among those who did not approve his doctrine.

The payment of the public debt, without a satisfactory adjustment of their tariff, brought on a crisis which will long be remembered. South Carolina carried out her doctrine; a convention of the people was called in their sovereign capacity, and the protective acts declared unconstitutional, and therefore void and no law. At the call of the State, Mr. Calhoun resigned his office of Vice-President of the United States, and was elected Senator in Congress, and took his seat in that body to defend her cause, which be believed to be the cause of liberty and the constitution. His re-appearance, after so many years, on the floor of a deliberative body, was under circumstances the most trying that can be conceived. He and his colleague stood almost alone. The cause was universally unpopular, and regarded as synonymous with disunion and treason. Under these circumstances, with all the disadvantage of not having spoken in a public assembly for more than sixteen years, he had to meet the joint array of talents, both of the administration and the opposition. In this trying juncture, he acquitted himself so well, that the tide of public opinion which so strongly set against him at the beginning of the session, turned in his favor, and those not convinced by his arguments, felt at least a conviction of his sincerity and patriotism. The contest was mainly between Mr. Calhoun and the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts, Mr. Webster, the principle point in issue between whom was finally reduced to the naked question, whether our constitution is or is not a *compact* between the States, the admitting that if it be a compact, the doctrines contended for by the former followed as necessary consequences.

We cannot dwell upon the efforts which Mr. Calhoun made during the highly interesting session of 1833, '34; but we may with confidence cite his speeches on the question of the deposites, the currency, the repeal of the force bill, and the pro-